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FEATURES

Singing, dancing and culture fill Winchester Town Hall during Indigenous Peoples Day

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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The Red Hawk Dancers and Singers helped everyone 'get the wiggles out' by dancing the Friendship Dance together during the Indigenous Peoples Day celebration in Maurer Auditorium on Oct. 13. The event was sponsored by the Network for Social Justice. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

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Na-Pow-Sa Pocknett says there are people within his own culture take that culture seriously, but the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal citizen

takes it very seriously.

And he shared that culture as one of the Red Hawk Singers & Dancers who performed at Winchester Town Hall on Oct. 13 during the Network for Social Justice's 5th annual Indigenous Peoples Celebration.

"There are stories about our history that aren't otherwise told," said Rebecca Slisz, executive director of The Network for Social Justice, when asked why this day was important.

Mashapee Wampanoag Tribe and Red Hawk Dancers & Singers members Nicole Minetti, left, dances the dance that honors all women while David Pocknett Jr., right, does a traditional dance at the Indigenous Peoples Day celebration in Maurer Auditorium on Oct. 13. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTOS/CHRIS STEVENS

"I think it's important for children to be exposed to the culture of the American Indians and to celebrate that culture," said Gemma McCarthy, who brought her two daughters to the event.

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Typically the event is held at Wright-Locke Farm, Slisz said, because NFSJ felt it was important to honor indigenous people in an appropriate way and because they are such stewards of the land, the farm was a perfect location.

But Monday's nor'easter had other plans.

Families make corn husk dolls, left, while residents were also able to view and touch plants used by Indigenous peoples.

COURTESY PHOTOS/TERRY DONOVAN

Inside Town Hall, children and their parents made the rounds making Wampanoag necklaces with Darius Coombs, also a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, and cornhusk dolls with his wife, Toodi Combs.

They also had a chance to learn about Lakota Youthstay, an organization that seeks to foster friendships between Native American children and children of Eastern Massachusetts, and check out Book Ends' offerings of books celebrating Indigenous voices.

Residents also not only saw, but were able to touch various plants, leaves and tree or shrub branches that were/are used by Indigenous peoples for medicinal and other reasons — all of which could be found at Wright-Locke Farm.

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"Mullein is the original Dr. Scholl's," said naturalist Jeff Adams, pointing to large long velvety soft leaves. "American Indians and colonists would line their moccasins or shoes with it when their feet were tired or hurting."

Mashapee Wampanoag Tribe members Nicole Minetti, left, David Pocknett Jr. and Na-Pow-Sa Pocknett posed for photos and answered questions during the Indigenous Peoples Day celebration on Oct. 13 at Town Hall. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS, LEFT, AND COURTESY PHOTOS/TERRY DONOVAN

Picking up a feathery leaved stem topped with clusters of small flowers, Adams said yarrow has been used medicinally for 60,000 years. Adams leads walks at Wright-Locke Farm, but credits Roland "Boot" Boutwell for his knowledge of flora.

There was even a legislative table at Monday's event, explaining efforts to try and change the state flag, seal and motto driven by decades of advocacy from Indigenous leaders and others who view the current imagery as inappropriate at best.

And of course, there were the Red Hawk Singers & Dancers led by Chee Nul Ka Pocknett.

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Getting to know the history

Chee Nul Ka Pocknett shared the story of his people from the arrival of the Mayflower to present day and he didn't hold back on the tough parts.

While the Wampanoag Tribe helped the colonists through a brutal first year in their new world by feeding them, healing them and teaching them sustainable farming, they were repaid with broken promises and later violence, Pocknett said.

He added while they were not natural fighters, the tribe was forced to defend their land and their way of life. The first dance the dancers did represented the skirmishes between the colonists and the tribe and his drum beat represented musket fire.

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Red Hawk Singers & Dancers Na-Pow-Sa Pocknett, Nicole Minetti and David Pocknett Jr. dance at Winchester Town Hall on Indigenous Peoples Day on Oct. 13. COURTESY PHOTOS/TERRY DONOVAN

But Pocknett also talked about how they are taught, starting at a very young age, to respect their elders and the harvest and the importance of "the three sisters," corn, beans and squash and why they're always grown together. He also shared stories, rituals and practices, like using a turtle shell to tell time and as a calendar.

"We don't use the Gregorian calendar because it makes absolutely no sense," he said, referring to the calendar most widely used today.

He also explained that their clothing and adornments are referred to as regalia.

"This is not a costume," he said.

Pocknett said they mainly wear their regalia, which he likened to church clothes or one's Sunday best, for official and special occasions.

And they danced. They danced The Crow Hop and a song honori
women, who are revered in their tribe, and the dancers got everyone up on

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their feet to join in a friendship dance.

Red Hawk Singers & Dancers Na-Pow-Sa Pocknett and Nicole Minetti perform for the crowd gathered at Winchester Town Hall on Oct. 13. COURTESY PHOTO/TERRY DONOVAN

“The only way you can mess this up is if you’re not smiling” Pocknett told the crowd as they formed two circles and moved to his song.

During a post-show Q&A, Chee Nul Ka, along with Na-Pow-Sa and fellow dancers, David Pocknett Jr. and Nicole Minetti, posed for photos and answered questions from kids and adults alike.

Na-Pow-Sa Pocknett said he likes to dance because “a lot of people can’t walk with us in the flesh, but they can walk with us in spirit,” and he feels that when he’s dancing. He invited curious kids to touch his hand-beaded (by his father) moccasins, the ring he danced with, which was covered in beaver fur and his robe or cloak was made to represent the wind and the prairies.

When asked how he maintains his values in today’s world, Chee Pocknett said he tries his best “to keep one foot in a shoe and one foot in a

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moccasin" in an effort to balance the values of today's world with the values of his world.

"It's a way of thinking and a way of being," he said.

Chris Stevens is an award-winning journalist who has spent 25 years chasing, editing and photographing stories on the North Shore. She is the co-founder and managing editor of Gotta Know Medford.

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community came together last week at the Griffin Museum of Photography for the inaugural Black History and Culture Celebration, an evening filled with music, student creativity, and powerful messages about equity, unity, and the enduring legacy of Black

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FEATURES

Winchester residents share more snow photos

Well, Winchester, we made it through the weekend with only a coating of snow that amounted to nothing on Sunday afternoon. But during the Feb. 22-23 blizzard, Winchester News once again asked residents to send their snow photos. And here is what we received! Solmaz Amirnazmi said her daughters and

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

March 2, 2026

FEATURES

Winchester Community Music School set to expand, upgrade

The big events in Winchester Community Music School always take place in Nichols Performance Hall. With the school and its performances’ growing in popularity, the hall and many of its amenities are due for an upgrade. The performance hall is one of the main areas that the school seeks to

TAVISHI CHATTOPADHYAY | CORRESPONDENT

February 26, 2026

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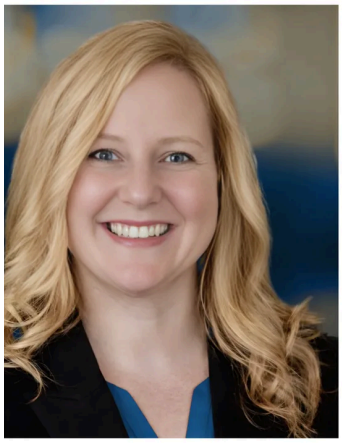

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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